

Carroll, Rhonda

From: Anne Hughes <ahughman@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 13, 2016 7:38 PM
To: JudTestimony; Rep. Willis, Roberta
Cc: ron@cagv.org; michelem@ctucc.org
Subject: Support of HB5054 and SB429

Dear Chairman Coleman and Chairman Tong, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Anne Hughes, Masters of Social Work Advocate from Sharon, CT. I have been a member of Northwest Prevention Network for 5 years and was a former Case Manager for mental health comprehensive community services. As a practitioner advocate from the field, I strongly support HB 5054, An Act Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence; and SB 429 An Act Concerning Service of Restraining Orders.

I urge you to support these bills because while they may not resolve the underlying causes that confound situations of domestic violence, these bills seek to make these crises more survivable... for everyone in the family at risk, including the abuser. I urge you to uphold the public duty of protection through the following legislative means: 1) having sworn police officers make service of temporary restraining orders; and 2) removing firearms from subjects of temporary restraining orders pending a hearing to take place no more than 14 days later, as necessary and important action to protect those most vulnerable to lethal danger: the children and the intimate partner who is in fear of their lives, and may be trying to leave the relationship for safety's sake and to protect the children from violence or witnessing violence, which can cause devastating secondary trauma.

As a Case Manager in another state's rural environment, I saw first-hand the cycle of violence that escalated to several homicide/suicides of (2) whole families for whom the presence of firearms in these volatile homes was un-survivable. There was too little, too late or no legal protections or recourse at all for police and courts and victims to take preventative action. Our social systems become complicit to the extreme violence that escalates terror within such families, and we can no longer use our ignorance of the predictable cycles of domestic violence to hide behind. We know that we must work to address the underlying causes and we know the specific cycles and phenomenon of domestic violence that creates victims of loved ones, and poses a threat most to those within one's own family, yet we must provide legal recourse for the police and courts to do their duty and offer the best and least-restrictive protection of the most vulnerable victims, especially the children, with the least intrusion on the rights and privacy of all, including the abuser. I believe HB 5054, An Act Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence; and SB 429 An Act Concerning Service of Restraining Orders, does just that. I urge the Judiciary Committee to empower the best protection and safest recourse for families caught in these volatile cycles that can and often do escalate, and increase the chances of survival for all families devastated by domestic violence.

I oppose 5597 because it automatically sets in motion the risk warrant process if a restraining order indicates the subject is in possession of a firearm. CT's Risk Warrant statute, while a valuable tool, does not fully address the needs of many domestic violence victims seeking the least confrontational option, and should NOT be the

only legal option for victims who believe their abuser's access to firearms is a safety risk to them. The Battered Women's Justice Project deems giving judges the discretion and the authority to order the firearm surrender in an ex parte or temporary civil restraining order to be a sounder policy because it shifts the responsibility to the state and courts to grant that hearing, and does not add an undue burden to victims under extreme stress and fear for their life, and I concur with this assessment.

CT's domestic violent deaths remain prevalent, and are frequently the result of gun crime. Let's make this risk far more survivable for CT families. We know nationally domestic assaults involving a firearm are 12 times more likely to result in fatal violence, and we know that women in abusive relationships are 5 times more likely to be killed when their abusers have access to a firearm. You can help make this tragedy survivable, so that we have a chance of breaking the cycle of domestic violence and all parties getting the help that they need and deserve.

- CT averaged 14 intimate partner homicides annually between 2000 and 2012. Guns were the most commonly used weapon (used in 39% of the homicides). State laws prohibiting firearm possession by persons subject restraining orders reduced rates of intimate partner homicide of women by 12-13% and overall by 10%.

In addition, the risk of suicide connected with a household firearm concerns not only the gun owner, but all household members. In fact, the relative risk for adolescents in the household is larger than that for the gun owner. The risk of suicide by firearm escalates under extreme stress, desperation, impulse control and anger, all conditions that can arise when restraining orders are placed resulting from escalation or threat of domestic violence.

I urge CT to lead by passing the solution-based, empowering and least-restrictive legislation of HB 5054, An Act Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence; and SB 429 An Act Concerning Service of Restraining Orders that provides the public officers, the police and the courts, the tools they need to uphold their duty to protect, and gives CT families the best chance of surviving the terror of domestic violence. Thank you.

Anne Hughes, MSW

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